



LAKE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



March 23, 2015

Re: support for HB 695

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of Lake County, Colorado, the Lake County Commissioners would like to express their support for Congressman Tipton's proposed HB 695 legislation. Our County's location on the continental divide with six trans-mountain water diversions and two major water storage facilities makes us acutely aware of the dangers that wildfires present to dependable water supplies and community sustainability in the wild land-urban interface. For years, we have tried to get funding to mitigate and thin our forest's trees, which are near the end of their lifecycle. Unsuccessful, we have watched those dollars go year after year to surrounding counties to clean up and replant their already destroyed forests, with only depleting allocations to our own forest to do anything about the situation. The more costly, reactionary funding to address impacted forests and watersheds makes little sense when compared to the costs of prevention.

Enter HB 695. Brad Piel and JW Associates did an independent rating of the risk that our forests have on the water storage and transmission facilities in the county and found that in the case of a wildfire, the financial and water supply impacts would be devastating. We in Lake County have been working with the forest service to initiate the Tennessee Creek Project to thin 11,000 acres within our 16,000 acre watershed. Although water providers like the City of Aurora, Colorado Springs Utilities and Pueblo Water Works are agreeing to assist, without federal funding, we will never come close to completing this project. We got lucky with the Mountain Pine Beetle, experiencing less impact than our surrounding counties to the north, but we now experience threats from the Spruce Beetle, drought and other forest pests. We have not been contacted by the Governor about such threats, but we would love the opportunity to share our concerns, as is provided in the congressman's legislation.

With longer term stewardship contracts, Lake County would be better able to solicit contractors and companies to use this lumber in a more sustainable, beneficial way. There needs to be some changes to the federal regulatory structure that currently prevents many critical mitigation projects from moving forward because of endless bureaucratic delays. The science is clear that in order for that to occur, overly dense undergrowth and beetle-killed timber needs to be removed. This bill allows that to happen responsibly, without unintended damage to the environment.

In closing, we feel that this legislation takes an important step toward wiser use of taxpayer funds as well as preventing forest concerns from becoming community catastrophes. We urge you to join us in supporting Representative Tipton in taking this long overdue action toward better funding.

Sincerely,

The Lake County Commissioners

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Michael J. Bordogna

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dolores M. Semsack". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dolores M. Semsack

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bruce J. Hix". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bruce J. Hix